

## **SUMMARY OF EQUITY AND SUSTAINABILITY COMMUNITY CONVERSATION**

The purpose of the Sustainable DC initiative is to create a strategic framework and vision to make the District the greenest, healthiest, and most livable city in the United States. Throughout the planning process, several “crosscutting” topic areas emerged: health, environmental education, jobs and job preparation, and social equity.

The following summary of a conversation about equity held on June 21, 2012, represents the ideas of more than 40 individuals who participated in person or provided feedback online about social equity and how it relates to issues of sustainability, as well as the implementation of the plan for a Sustainable DC. This information will be used in the development of the Sustainable DC Implementation Plan.

### **1. What are significant challenges regarding equity in the District?**

- Affordable housing
- Gentrification – DC more gentrified than ever before, rents are rising, not enough mixed-/low-income housing units.
- Unequal wealth distribution – employment, health, and other challenges are all connected to income issues; household income of existing residents is low compared to higher incomes of new residents; Wards 7 and 8 are most undeveloped and have the most public housing, also have lack of local economy and jobs; access to capital is not equal.
- Involvement:
  - Community needs to be involved on solutions from the beginning
  - People should be involved in planning processes, but day to day needs prevent this
- Education and raising awareness about sustainability, disparities, and equity issues, especially beyond affordable housing

### **2. Are there any people or communities who might not yet embrace Sustainable DC? Why do you think that might be?**

- High wealth communities may not be concerned or may seek to buy their way out
- General lack of awareness among people who don’t have specific connections to a particular sustainability piece
- People are engaged when it’s personally relevant, affects them directly, or when they can see themselves in it.
- New immigrant communities and/or low English proficiency speakers
- Other isolated groups: people with limited mobility; people who don’t use email regularly; Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients, other low income populations
- People who are not aware of the connections between sustainability and themselves (especially connecting sustainability to economics and equity), how Vision goals may affect them (good or bad), or who may care but have competing priorities

### **3. How can we present Sustainable DC or topics of sustainability to individuals or groups who may feel that sustainability doesn’t relate to them?**

- Calibrated, tailored messages
  - Use resonant examples for different neighborhoods, groups, needs, interests
  - Meet people where they are; relate to what they care about and connect at that level
  - “What’s in it for me?” needs to be the message

- Shorter, simple messages
- Solicit appropriate messengers
  - Get different messengers who have ties to different groups
  - Target grandparents to reach the youth audience
  - Find the “one who can bring 10” in the community
  - Use existing community groups and neighbor connections; peer to peer
- Present ideas/messages that relate to daily lives, embedded practices
- Target messages where people are: homes, apartments, grocery stores, where people are out and living lives
- Don’t have a “sustainability meeting” – go to existing meetings (church, ANCs, etc.) to find out what the audience cares about and how “green” is connected to that; environmental message is overdone – what else resonates with people? Social or business cases?
- Social marketing/media: send messages that people understand; what does it mean, and what does it mean to them?

**4. What are important equity goals or targets that we can emphasize in the Sustainable DC Implementation Plan?**

- Affordable housing goals
  - Distribution of housing
  - To whom is it affordable?
  - All affordable housing retrofitted to be energy efficient (include middle income, too)
  - People want to know if they can afford to stay in their home/neighborhood
- Jobs and green economy goals
  - Emphasize goals that help people who felt left out of starting businesses
  - Goals around business ownership demographics – self-employment and cooperative ownership
- Reduce disparities; don’t just aim for low-hanging fruit, but look for who could benefit the most (for example – if goal is bringing locally grown food within 75% of the population, WHICH 75%?)
- Measure different things for different groups – can’t measure citywide, must break down geographically and set different goals
- Create equity measures for all the Vision goals

**5. Moving forward, what specific actions can the District take to ensure that Sustainable DC initiatives are implemented equitably? How do we measure that initiatives are implemented equitably?**

- Ensure continuity of initiative
  - Lock-in support from Mayor to Mayor
  - Shift from talking about Mayor Gray’s plan to talking about a plan that exists beyond his administration
  - Bring Council on board
  - Embed in long-term plans, DC laws; institutionalize process
- Set clear expectations: in plans and policies, equity must be evident, a priority, and clearly written out; set clear, critical benchmarks about what equity is and for whom.
- Shift burden away from government to business and non-profits; focus government activity on core services to support community initiatives
- End “silo-ing” (barriers between agencies) at DC agencies; collaboration between government and public is what continues framework

- Build capacity within DC government staff: train/educate staff around equity issues; make equity officials part of staff, system (both in terms of policy and the mentality)
- Ensure resources are there, including government's role to encourage and subsidize small grants
- Gather public opinion: ask people how DC government is doing; link to new Grade DC

**6. What actions can you take to steer this process and empower your community?**

- Local solutions come from really local level (smaller than ANC-level)
- Citizens need to build their own social capital and inventory their assets – outsiders may not recognize what's important to local residents
- Identify one or two “funnels of information” – people who can monitor what's going on in government/at public meetings and let others know
- Direct outreach by students, faculty, peers
- Grassroots activity on legislation